

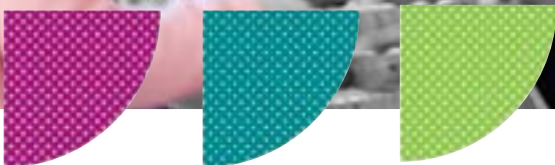


ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

Advocacy Priorities for Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists



Public Policy Agenda



Who We Are...

Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment, including hearing aids.

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) identify, assess, and treat speech, language, swallowing, and cognitive communication disorders.

Audiologists and SLPs provide medically necessary services to people of all ages, from infants to older adults, to maximize health and functional outcomes for quality of life. They work in a variety of settings including health care facilities (in-patient, outpatient, private practice), schools, and universities.

Speech, language, and hearing scientists are professionals who investigate the biological, physical, and psychological processes of communication and develop evidence-based methods for diagnosing and treating individuals with speech, language, and hearing problems.

Audiology assistants and speech-language pathology assistants (SLPAs) are support personnel who, after appropriate training and demonstration of competency, perform delegated tasks that are prescribed, directed, and supervised by a certified and/or licensed audiologist or a certified and/or licensed speech-language pathologist.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 228,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology assistants; and students.



I'M HERE SUPPORTING

funding for IDEA + telehealth



The 2024 Public Policy Agenda (PPA) identifies ASHA's top advocacy priorities based on input from ASHA members. Guided by the PPA—and working collaboratively with lawmakers, policymakers, decision makers, and allied stakeholders at the state and federal level—ASHA seeks to accomplish the following goals:

- Build bipartisan support at the federal, state, and local levels to advance policy priorities that reflect the concerns and interests of ASHA members and the populations that they serve.
- Protect or improve coverage and payment for audiology and speech-language pathology services across settings and service delivery models.
- Empower and educate ASHA members and state associations with practical resources and tools to navigate daily professional challenges—such as fair pay, workplace safety, and appropriate caseloads/ workloads.
- Protect funding for programs that provide access to hearing, balance, speech, language, swallowing, and cognition-related care that audiologists and SLPs provide.
- Promote a more robust and diverse workforce to address provider shortages and ensure inclusive policies and practices.

The PPA groups priorities in three primary areas of focus: (1) workforce; (2) payment and coverage; and (3) service delivery and access. These areas of top concern were identified based on input from ASHA members through a variety of sources, including the 2024 Advocacy Priority Survey, online chats with ASHA staff and leadership, social media interactions, and member-initiated contact.

The Government Affairs and Public Policy Board developed the priorities in each of the focus areas to provide a framework for ASHA's advocacy on behalf of its members and to allow the Association's Government Affairs and Public Policy team to develop specific actionable objectives to make meaningful progress in these areas. In addition, ASHA remains committed to ensuring that these priorities infuse initiatives to promote greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in policies and programs that impact our members.

We appreciate the input provided by ASHA members to help guide the development of the 2024 PPA, and we look forward to your active engagement and advocacy in support of these priorities.

Sincerely,

*Government Affairs and
Public Policy Board*





Workforce Priorities

ASHA's ongoing advocacy efforts focus on ensuring that licensing and certification requirements are maintained in states across the U.S.; supporting the ability to practice to the fullest extent of one's education and training; and preserving the critical role of audiologists and SLPs across work settings as well as productivity standards that support clinical excellence, ethical practice, and high-quality service delivery.

For 2024, we are enhancing efforts to help address the shortage of practitioners that often contributes to high workloads, burnout, and dissatisfaction across work settings by

- expanding opportunities to **grow and diversify** the audiology and speech-language pathology workforce;
- promoting **working environments** that facilitate safe and effective service delivery;

- supporting statewide salary supplement legislation for educational audiologists and school-based SLPs who hold ASHA's Certificate of Clinical Competence in Audiology (CCC-A) and/or ASHA's Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech-Language Pathology (CCC-SLP) to receive **additional compensation for maintaining their CCCs**;
- expanding advocacy tools for school-based practitioners to self-advocate at the local and district level; and
- ensuring **appropriate recognition of and support for educational audiologists and school-based SLPs** and advocating for policies that facilitate efficient and effective service delivery for students with communication disorders in school settings.





Payment and Coverage Priorities

ASHA continuously engages with regulators and key decision makers—including public (Medicare, Medicaid) and private payers—on payment and coverage policies that reflect the value and full scope of audiology and speech-language pathology services as well as the training and expertise of our members.

For 2024, advocacy efforts address policies that limit client/patient access to care due to (1) unsustainably low payment rates for services provided by audiologists and SLPs and (2) inadequate coverage for their evaluation and treatment services. We are advocating for the following key priorities:

- **Pursuing equitable funding and establishing policies to support** the timely identification, evaluation, treatment, and management of speech, language, feeding/swallowing, cognitive, hearing, and balance disorders.
- Including audiologists and SLPs in **emerging health care delivery systems** as payment and coverage trends move from fee-for-service to value-based care.
- **Expanding and permanently covering telehealth services** provided by audiologists and SLPs—including, but not limited to, supporting payment parity policies and policies that explicitly incorporate the full audiology and speech-language pathology scope of practice across settings.



Service Delivery and Access Priorities

ASHA monitors and responds to legislative and regulatory changes that could impact licensing and certification requirements and/or the scope of practice for audiologists and SLPs as well as for audiology and speech-language pathology assistants. We also work to advance policies that create an environment conducive to efficient and effective service delivery that broadens access to critical services that audiologists and SLPs provide.

For 2024, ASHA is working to address barriers that impede the ability of audiologists and SLPs to provide robust and inclusive access to care by

- **supporting anti-discriminatory policies and practices** that could impact audiologists and SLPs working with people who have communication disorders;
- promoting initiatives that **support screenings in hearing loss and communication disorders**, collaboration and engagement of parents/caregivers, and the education of decision makers on services provided in early intervention settings; and
- **operationalizing the Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact (ASLP-IC)** and continuing to add states participating in the ASLP-IC.¹

According to the Office of Special Education Programs, the percentage of infants and toddlers in the U.S. population who are receiving early intervention services under IDEA, Part C, birth through 2 years continues to increase. SLPs are among the top three professionals providing these services.²



The 2024 Public Policy Agenda was developed by the

2023 Government Affairs and Public Policy Board



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- **Arynn Byrd**, CCC-SLP, Early Career Professional Member
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- **Michelle Mannebach**, Consultant

ASHA's Government Affairs and Public Policy Board is charged with (a) developing the Association's annual public policy agenda for adoption by the ASHA Board of Directors; (b) ensuring that ASHA members' strategic needs and interests are represented in the Association's annual public policy agenda; (c) providing ongoing coordination of communication with other ASHA committees, councils, boards, members, and state speech-language-hearing associations concerning the legislative, regulatory, and other public policy activities and initiatives of the Association; and (d) making recommendations to—and working with—the ASHA National Office staff to develop strategies to achieve the public policy agenda of the Association.

Did You Know...

AUDIOLOGISTS:

Employment is projected to grow **10% from 2021 to 2031**—faster than the average growth rate for all occupations—with about **800** openings projected each year.³



About **3 out of every 4** nonfatal workplace violence injuries involved health care and social service professionals.⁴



SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS:

Employment is projected to grow **21% from 2021 to 2031**, with about **14,000** openings projected each year.⁵



ASHA's membership does not mirror the U.S. population of communities served, and that reality limits their ability to train students, serve clients, and conduct research.⁶



53% OF CLINICIANS report accepting out-of-pocket payment from patients for **telehealth** services because these services are not covered by insurance.⁷



Payment reductions jeopardize access to care for patients as audiologists and SLPs are forced to make operational changes to survive.

19% reduced the number of clinical staff.

21% reduced the number of clinical staff hours.

30% took on additional employment to make ends meet.⁸

¹American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact. <https://www.asha.org/advocacy/state/audiology-and-speech-language-pathology-interstate-compact/>.

²U.S. Department of Education. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Blog. (Apr. 2021). OSEP Releases Fast Facts on Part C and B New Data Files and Part B Personnel. <https://sites.ed.gov/osers/2021/04/osep-releases-fast-facts-on-part-c-and-b-new-data-files-and-part-b-personnel/>.

³U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). Occupational Outlook Handbook, Audiologists. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/audiologists.htm>.

⁴U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020). Workplace Violence in Healthcare, 2018. <https://www.bls.gov/iif/factsheets/workplace-violence-healthcare-2018.htm>.

⁵U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). Occupational Outlook Handbook, Speech-Language Pathologists. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/speech-language-pathologists.htm>.

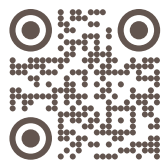
⁶American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2023). Members & Affiliate Profile Trends 2002-2022. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/surveys/2002-2022-member-and-affiliate-profile-trends.pdf>.

⁷American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Telehealth Improves Patient Access to Care. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/advocacy/telepractice-data-fact-sheet.pdf>.

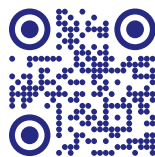
⁸American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (April 2023). Insurance Reimbursement Reductions Survey.



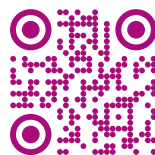
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